

April 2010



just the FACTs

This fact sheet is provided as a reference to encourage a greater understanding of the various issues related to managing water in South Florida.



sfwmd.gov
 South Florida Water Management District
 3301 Gun Club Road
 West Palm Beach, Florida 33406
 561-686-8800 or 800-432-2045
www.sfwmd.gov

MAILING ADDRESS: P.O. Box 24680
 West Palm Beach, FL 33416-4680

Lake Okeechobee Operation Goals, Roles and Responsibilities

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) manages Lake Okeechobee water levels with the goal of balancing flood control, public safety, navigation, water supply and ecological health. The USACE bases operational decisions – whether to retain or release water in the 730-square mile lake – on its regulation schedule and the best available science and data provided by its staff and a variety of partners, including the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD).

Goals for Lake Management:

- Providing public safety through flood protection for 7.5 million residents – including safeguarding the Herbert Hoover Dike during its rehabilitation
- Maintaining water supply for residents, businesses, agriculture and the environment
- Sustaining seagrasses and aquatic vegetation that serve as critical habitat for a variety of fish, shellfish, birds and mammals, including those that drive Florida's tourism industry
- Achieving salinity levels in the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries that provide a healthy ecosystem for spawning fish and invertebrates
- Fostering foraging and nesting success for wading birds; protecting endangered, threatened and native species such as the Everglade snail kite and the wood stork
- Managing the lake level to best balance all of these goals

U.S. Army Corps Responsibilities:

- Making ultimate decision to retain or release water
- Managing the lake between 12.5 and 15.5 feet throughout the year
- Adhering to the Lake Okeechobee regulation schedule, which was reevaluated and updated in 2008
 - This guidance prescribes low-volume releases to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries to keep lake level within the desired range
 - The 2008 update reduces the frequency of larger releases that have greater impact on receiving water bodies
- Monitoring the upper basin north of Lake Okeechobee, lake inflows and the integrity of the Herbert Hoover Dike to protect local communities
- Participating in weekly conference calls with partners, such as the SFWMD, to collect information and discuss variables such as rainfall, health of aquatic vegetation and wildlife and a variety of related data

SFWMD Science and Engineering Role:

- Providing unique expertise and data for assessing ecological health of lake, St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries and surrounding ecosystems
- Supplying rainfall forecasts and climate outlooks from staff meteorologists and a staff climatologist, along with analysis of rainfall data from an expansive rain gage network
- Providing knowledge exchange between SFWMD scientists and water managers at the USACE
- Assuring water supply to legal, permitted users from Lake Okeechobee under the authority of the State of Florida, through the SFWMD